

National Farm Animal Identification and Records Testimony

of Jodi Luttropp, on behalf of the
Holstein Association USA, Inc.

Before the

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture,
Subcommittee on Livestock and Horticulture

July 22, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Committee Members. My name is Jodi Luttropp and I am the Coordinator of the National Farm Animal Identification and Records Program.

National FAIR is an animal ID and traceability program in place and working today, that incorporates radio frequency identification (RFID) tags. The National FAIR program provides each animal with a unique identification number, and uses electronic RFID ear tags to identify and track animals. Similar to a Social Security number or a car's vehicle identification number, the number stays with the animal for its lifetime.

The Holstein Association USA, Inc. has worked cooperatively with USDA/APHIS-VS since 1999. Our charter, as stated in the agreement, was, "To design, develop, and demonstrate a pilot project for a national livestock identification program that will track livestock from farm-to-farm, farm-to-market, and market-to-processing unit." We have accomplished our goal. The National FAIR program has been identifying and tracing animals from birth to slaughter for several years. We have an infrastructure already in place consisting of a comprehensive database, a dedicated tag provider, and a coordinated field service staff. We have the capability to start putting into place today what the U.S. Animal Identification Plan calls for implementing in 2006. National FAIR fulfills the standards outlined by the U.S. Animal Identification Program, USAIP.

When animals are identified, the information is entered into the National FAIR database. Currently, there are well over 1.3 million animals in the National FAIR database. Information stored in the FAIR system includes where and when the animal was born, what locations the animal has been at, such as farms, markets, or processing plants, what livestock the animal has had contact with, and eventually where and when the animal was slaughtered. The information on the National FAIR database allows for the tracing of an animal's movements, from birth to slaughter, in as little as a few minutes. As part of our system, tag readers designed to read electronic tags are already in place in markets and processing facilities across the United States.

The National FAIR system includes a security module that enforces the "Rules of Access" for information. Currently the State of Michigan has adopted privacy rules that allow producers to view information regarding their premises or animals, but does not allow them to view other producers' information. Those at the state government level have access to information required to perform identification and traceability during a health emergency. The security module deployed by National FAIR is a robust component capable of allowing flexibility in defining security access to information. Furthermore, the structure of the National FAIR database is dynamic and flexible, and is compatible with many current herd management software programs and allows for the inclusion of new technologies as they become available.

It is critical to understand that the National FAIR Program was developed by producers, for producers. The National FAIR Program is part of the Holstein Association USA, Inc. which has 35,000 member-producers throughout the United States. Those producers govern the Association, and only adopt policies and procedures that work in the field and are beneficial to the consuming public. Those same producers have, through our Association, invested over \$2 million in the development of the National FAIR Program.

It is our belief that animal identification for production animal agriculture in this country needs to be mandatory. Additionally, it cannot be technology

neutral; the RFID technology employed by National FAIR is the most accurate, efficient, and cost effective form of animal ID used in the world today, and will likely be for many years in the future. Without a mandatory animal identification program in this country, we will continue to be denied market access to certain countries throughout the world.

Producers will resist if the government controls an individual animal identification system in the United States; therefore, it is important that a producer-supported and driven program be responsible for animal traceability. The Holstein Association USA has been identifying animals in this country for 119 years, and is recognized throughout the world as the leader in animal identification. We believe the government's role would be in the area of providing funding for the infrastructure of a national mandatory identification program—such as database development and readers.

This country's animal agriculture producers, including our 35,000 members, are at risk today with the threats of additional cases of BSE in this country, and the threat of foot-and-mouth disease. Although the National FAIR Program will not prevent diseases from occurring, if they do show up, it will allow for immediate isolation and tracking of animals.

The National FAIR Program is ready today to meet the needs for a mandatory, national animal identification program in the United States to help protect our nation's food supply, and minimize the risk associated with a future disease outbreak. We urge your support of this important initiative.

Thank you!